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# ‘Nature’, nationhood and the poetics of meaning in Ruhuna (Yala) National Park, Sri Lanka

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Ruhuna, or Yala as it is more commonly known, is Sri Lanka's most famous national park, attracting hundreds of thousands of nature lovers annually. Included in the wealth of attractions that Ruhuna offers its visitors are transcendent landscape experiences amidst what is popularly considered to be its sacred and premodern ‘nature’. This paper traces the powerful connections between this popular poetics of landscape experience and the creation of racialized difference and political enmity, in the context of a modern nation-state that has only just seen the end of a fiercely contested civil war between a Sinhalese Buddhist majority and Tamil separatists. It suggests that movement through Ruhuna's space variously fosters senses of belonging, attachment and exclusion in relation to Sri Lankan soil. The paper begins with the history of the reinscription of meaning in this former colonial game reserve. It then proceeds to show how the park's contemporary and sacred meanings shape experiences in the present, mapping subjects' bodies with historical, religious and territorial discourses that configure Tamils as ‘invaders’ and ‘interlopers’ in national space that has become Sinhalese and Buddhist by ‘nature’. Ruhuna emerges as a powerful tool whose Sinhala history and Buddhist ‘nature’ are not merely palimpsests of a primordial and premodern antiquity, but map and signify Sri Lanka's exclusive topographies in the present.

Deep in the arid, south-eastern coastal fringes of Sri Lanka is Ruhuna National Park, or ‘Yala’ as it is more commonly known. The park itself has five ‘blocks’ although the area known as Yala comprises a contiguous system of nine national reserves (Figure 1) covering 377 square miles. Today, because of the recent civil war and perceived security threats from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), only Blocks I and II are open to the public. The park contains thornbush landscapes interspersed with pockets of dense secondary forest. It is dotted with plains where animals can be observed at ease, and water holes as well as rocky outcrops where leopards and bears can be seen. The park is also replete with elephants, sambhur, buffalo, deer, wild boar, snakes, lizards, crocodiles and an abundance of bird life.

National parks in Sri Lanka are designated areas reserved for wildlife, into which visitors may enter. They appeal to tourists, weekend trippers and wildlife enthusiasts alike. Visitors travel to the park either having booked permits from the Department of Wildlife Conservation in advance or with the intention of purchasing them at the

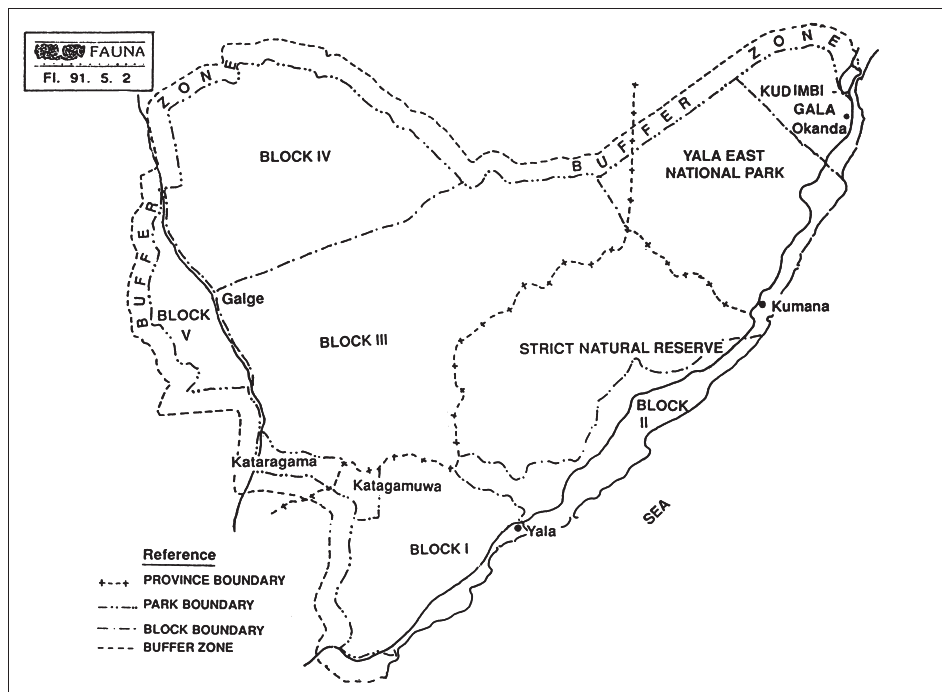


FIGURE 1 Yala National Reserves. (H.W. Jayawardene, ed., *Yala National Park* (Sri Lanka, Fauna International Trust, 1993) p. 8.)

Warden's bungalow at the park gate. Accommodation is available in eight bungalows situated inside Block I, each sleeping between five and ten adults, although these must be booked in advance. There is alternative accommodation in two campsites within the park, or in the thriving town of Tissamaharama, 12 kilometres away. Tissamaharama is also where visitors stock up on provisions if they are staying in the park: water, meat, vegetables, coconut milk, kerosene, mosquito repellent, beer, arak or vehicle spares, for example. More expensive accommodation can be found in the private Yala Safari Hotel, situated close to the park gate. Visitors to Ruhuna will usually go on early morning and/or afternoon tours of the park, accompanied by an experienced Department of Wildlife Conservation trekker. When touring the park, visitors navigate 'jeepable' tracks in Block I (usually in a four-wheel drive). They must stay inside the vehicle at all times, except at the bungalows and a few other designated spots. The Department of Wildlife Conservation also organizes scheduled tours in its own vehicles for those who do not have transport.

Since its inception in 1938, Ruhuna has remained the most popular national park in Sri Lanka. In 1995 there were approximately 245 000 visitors to the park, most of whom were classified as locals (Sri Lankan), although a significant number were foreign tourists.<sup>1</sup> It is to visitor experiences that this paper pays particular attention. As one of

Sri Lanka's most popular and famous destinations for domestic tourism, wildlife and 'nature' experiences within the park are enthusiastically retold in a variety of realms within Sri Lankan society: in newspaper accounts and poems, in photographic, documentary and scholarly mediums, and especially in everyday conversation. This paper unravels such popular and commonplace landscape experiences, showing how they have been historically and geographically shaped. By proceeding to reread and scratch beneath the surface of visitor subjectivities within Ruhuna National Park, the paper makes explicit the powerful connections between the apparently benign poetics of landscape experience and the creation of racialized difference and political enmity in Sri Lanka. In particular, popular transcendent experiences amidst Ruhuna's 'sacred nature' are shown to evoke the exclusive parameters of the modern Sri Lankan nation-state.

Tracing such landscape geographies is complex. There can be no clear-cut methodological guide to the empirical industry required to draw the conceptual lines between nature, history, affect and the politics of place. This paper employs a cast of interlocking methods that continually tack back and forth between subjectivity and representation. Some of what follows draws upon my own movements, practices and participation as a fairly typical domestic ecotourist in Ruhuna National Park, during which times my intentions as a researcher went mostly unannounced to Department of Wildlife Conservation officials and other tourists with whom I conversed, albeit not to friends who accompanied and assisted me.<sup>2</sup> This allowed me to glimpse and fluidly encounter the social relations, cultural practices and, importantly, emergent affects and encounters in the park.<sup>3</sup> As the paper progresses, however, I step back to consider a wide range of written sources that both flesh these participant observations out and explain the historical and cultural logics behind such experiences. These written sources include the Colonial and Dominions Office's administrative reports, Department of Wildlife Conservation and Archaeological Survey reports, articles and accounts from the journal of Sri Lanka's Wildlife and Nature Protection Society (Loris), and newspaper articles, editorials and letters, as well as a host of published secondary sources. Research was conducted between Colombo, Ruhuna National Park and London.

## **Ruhuna National Park**

Ruhuna's roots as a national park are entrenched in its colonial history. To the British, the region's overgrown jungles were devoid of culture and economy in the mid-nineteenth century. The spread of civilization was achieved by the heroic subjugation of 'unruly' nature, and in 1898 the 'Yala Game Sanctuary' was established. 'The Hunt' was considered a noble and romantic pursuit that civilized this peripheral corner of Ceylon, described by British administrators in 1873 as 'mostly forest and low jungle, infested by animals and fever haunted'.<sup>4</sup> Civilizing the very margins of this peripheral colony through hunting was not just an appropriate aristocratic gentleman's leisure pursuit; it also affirmed the power, legitimacy and scope of the colonizing project itself.<sup>5</sup> Yala's emparkment thus fixed in space relationships of power, proprietorship

and morality between the human and non-human world – relationships intensely European in origin that have, over the years, reinforced juxtapositions between ‘nature’ and culture. Today leopards and elephants in Yala are tamed with camera lenses and environmental management policies rather than with rifles and hounds. The myriad representational practices that have constituted the park have thus enacted Sri Lankan ‘nature’ as a physical place to which one can go.<sup>6</sup>

Although Ruhuna’s colonial legacies linger in a variety of powerful ways,<sup>7</sup> today the park attracts visitors for very different reasons. Flora and fauna are not the only attractions. Archaeological ruins are woven into Ruhuna’s ‘nature’, and these are amongst the only designated spots where visitors may alight from their vehicles whilst inside the park. Archaeological sites within Ruhuna have been renovated by the state selectively through the last century in ways that have signified the area’s historical and religious significance in Sri Lankan myths of origin. Historical and religious myths have, in fact, become inseparable from the park’s material and discursive ‘nature’, such that Ruhuna National Park occupies a pre-eminent, if contested, place in the popular Sri Lankan imagination. The park is said to overlie the former Sinhalese kingdom, Ruhuna, which was the jungle refuge of the Sinhalese hero king Dutthugemenu in the second century BCE. Legendary Sri Lankan history suggests that in this period the South Indian Tamil Elara ‘invaded’ and conquered Anuradhapura, the capital of the northern Sinhalese kingdom. Dutthugemenu, the deposed Sinhalese heir to Anuradhapura’s throne, took refuge in the wealthy and irrigated Ruhuna kingdom in the south. This inhospitable jungle, located at the very edge of the island, emerged as the home that nurtured and protected Dutthugemenu, preparing him to wage a 15-year war with Elara that he eventually won to regain (Sinhalese) control in the north, at that time the heart of the island.<sup>8</sup> These events are dramatized as central themes in the final chapter of the sacred Buddhist text the *Mahavamsa*, subtitled *The great chronicle of Ceylon*, its imagery feeding into contemporary narratives of national history, memory and geography.

Considered in this light, Ruhuna National Park’s authorized history can be situated within Sri Lanka’s wider post-independent politics of nationhood that has only recently seen the cessation of a bloody civil war fought between a Sinhala-Buddhist government and Tamil separatists. Sri Lanka’s 18.2 million inhabitants fall into three racialized ethnic groups. The Sinhalese constitute the vast majority, around 74 per cent, most of whom are Buddhist. The largest minority population is Tamil, who are mostly Hindu, accounting for around 15.4 per cent. A small percentage of Sri Lanka’s population, around 7 per cent, are Muslims, and there are a handful of Sri Lankan Burghers.<sup>9</sup> Sri Lanka’s post-independent politics has been characterized by Sinhalese majoritarian rule and the former colony’s gradual conversion to a non-secular Buddhist State, such that in 1972 Buddhism was written into Sri Lanka’s constitution.<sup>10</sup> In response, various Tamil nationalists have protested their marginalization, and from 1983 to 2002 the Sri Lankan government was engaged in a bitter war against the LTTE, who demanded nothing less than a separate northern and eastern Tamil homeland, Eelam.<sup>11</sup> Both Sinhalese and Tamil claims of belonging invoke histories that stretch over millennia, well predating the existence of any kind of cohesive island-state.

Despite such historical associations, however, Ruhuna National Park is also widely conceived of as an innocent space. One famed in the Sinhalese historical imagination, yes, but equally a space of recreation, 'nature' and wildlife. Indeed, venturing into Yala today it is difficult not to gain first-hand experience of the sanctity and tranquility that exude from its 'nature'. Upon entering Block I of Ruhuna National Park, visitors pass through an elaborate gate upon which there is a portal inscription. Yellow letters painted on a dark green board announce:

Through these gates you enter a Protected area. The animals, birds, trees, the water, the breeze on your face and every grain of sand, are gifts that nature has passed on to you through your ancestors so that you may survive. These gifts are sacred and should be protected. Whisper a silent prayer as you pass through for the protection of wilderness around you and ensure that what you see and feel is passed on to the unborn generations to come.<sup>12</sup>

From hereon in the expectation and excitement of encountering at any moment a wild elephant, leopard or bear emerging from its natural habitat becomes somehow indissoluble from the feeling that one has stepped into a sacred place, rich in history. Encounters with wild animals (Figure 2) are savoured, often photographed. Animal behavior is keenly observed, to be later explained by the trekker. Throughout vehicle-bound tours visitors are struck by the tranquillity that seems to seep from the succession of different 'natural' landscapes and ecologies through which one moves; flat plains dotted with grazing buffalo, thick, boggy shrub jungle, sand dunes and rocky outcrops



FIGURE 2 A typical vehicle-bound experience in Ruhuna.



where one may see leopards basking, or glassy green lakes dotted with feeding cormorants, for example.

For most visitors, such mobile nature observation is punctuated by peripatetic experiences of some of the park's rich archaeological landscapes, such as Situlpahuwa or Magulmahivara. At Akasachetiya for example, having parked their vehicles, visitors can reach the summit of this rock outcrop after a short, steep, 20-minute climb. Here there is a small pool in which lotus flowers bloom, next to the ruins of a Buddhist dagoba just a few metres high, dating back to the second century BCE.<sup>13</sup> From here there are breathtaking views over the park, the elevation offering a sense of Ruhuna National Park's territory. In the distance one can see the gleaming white towers of the restored Situlpahuwa temple complex, which receives 50 000 Buddhist pilgrims each year (Figure 3).

On my own visits to Akasachetiya I could not help but think that all the 'nature' between here and there was somehow just as sacred. I was acutely aware that the Sinhala history of these two places, Akasachetiya and Situlpahuwa, seemed to cast a web of meaning over all that lay in between. Indeed, these feelings were not merely isolated or solipsistic connections with the park's Sinhala history and Buddhist 'nature'. A number of essays published in *Loris*, the journal of Sri Lanka's Fauna and Flora Protection Society – the country's foremost non-governmental



FIGURE 3 The view from the top of Akasachetiya. In the distance one can see the gleaming white towers of the Situlpahuwa temple complex.

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authority on nature and national parks – testify that similar types of 'national park experience' were actively promoted through the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

Few people who visit the Yala National Park and delight in its vistas of jungle cover and its fauna and flora, realise that in ancient times it was the home of a people pulsating with life, cultivating their paddy fields, growing their crops and living a full life as it then obtained.<sup>15</sup>

Similar such pieces implied instruction and advice for visitors on how best to absorb this history, on how to engage with Ruhuna's 'nature':

It is sad that of the many thousands that go to Ruhuna National Park for the day or a longer stay, very few enjoy the trees, shrubs and other plants of this portion of land that has been left to nature. No doubt this aspect of one's destination is not so dramatic as the animals, perhaps less colourful than the birds, perhaps less animate too. *But if you were to pause and if you were to look around there is romance, there is beauty, history and science in and among this silent living.*<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, there was also something peculiarly normal about my own subjectivities on top of Akasachetiya. It was an awareness of how the poetics of landscape meaning are so rooted in the Buddhist discourse that Ruhuna National Park's Sinhala history evokes; an awareness that the park and its normative 'nature' have contributed to cementing a potent relationship between religion and social reality. It is these sensations and subjectivities that this paper proceeds to explore in more depth.

## **'Nature', national parks and nationhood**

In a nation that pretends to 'racial' pluralism, such a poetics of meaning can no longer be seen as merely benign visitor experience, an innocent and 'deep' connection with Sri Lankan 'nature'. Crucially, it is through such a potent mix of religion, 'nature' and social reality that racialized identities are powerfully evoked. This paper investigates the ways that this type of vertical connection with Sri Lankan soil, stone and tree, in one of its most famous 'national' landscapes, invokes a cultural politics largely incompatible with the workings of a plural and inclusive nation-state.

Central to this research is the employment of post-structural and cultural theory to facilitate an understanding of how the meanings to which humans ascribe and experience in a 'real world out there' have been partially constituted by text, representation and discourse. In particular, this paper is driven by attempts to historicize the discursive construction of 'nature' through different times and spaces.<sup>17</sup> Thinking *through* 'nature' reveals a complex knot of contradictions. Whilst it apparently points to essences diametrically opposed to that which is cultural,<sup>18</sup> it is often enough materially constructed in ways that both adapt it to contemporary needs and encourage a culturally specific perception of those essences.<sup>19</sup> 'Nature' points to such a vast range of materialities, perceptions and experiences that it cannot be fixed or defined universally across time or space. It can be the grass beneath our feet, the 'natural' fibres of cotton, the stuff rocks are made of, that which grows in the allotment or even that which encroaches on the allotment. Within environmental history this has given rise to calls that 'the nature we study become less natural and more cultural'.<sup>20</sup>



Thinking about 'cultures of nature' thus reveals the complex and chaotic social and historical processes, as well as the tangled trajectories of practical and political decision-making, that lead to the formation of taken-for-granted perceptions of what nature is.

However, this emphasis on constructing 'nature' is not to deny its materiality. Quite the opposite, in fact: 'nature' usually has some substantive element to it.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, such substantive elements often point to particular cultural expressions of reality. Their assumed diametrical opposition to super-organic 'culture' points to (pre-)ontological essences; things believed to exist in the world, if not unaltered by society then certainly unaltered by the passage of human history. Spaces where 'nature' resides are also, more often than not, construed as 'participatory spaces'<sup>22</sup> wherein humans will experience the pre-social realities to which 'nature' points. Here subjects and worlds simultaneously emerge in the practice of everyday life; here they are continuously composed and recomposed along planes of immanent becoming.<sup>23</sup> Grounding the human body in 'nature' – or mapping it through 'nature' – provides a framework from within which people consciously and pre-reflectively interpret such experience. That is to say, if 'nature' produces a body, then it is this body that will mediate raw experience of being in the material world. This coagulation of discourse and subjectivity gives rise to the world with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing;<sup>24</sup> objects and beings are (re)produced relationally and affectually.<sup>25</sup> Despite historical, cultural and political constructions, then, experiences of being in 'nature' are often felt to be physical connections with some enduring form of pre-cultural (in a super-organic sense) reality. As Castree and Braun suggest, this approach

insist[s] that what counts as 'nature', and our experience of nature (including our bodies), is always historical, related to a configuration of historically specific social and representational practices which form the nuts and bolts of our interactions with, and investments in, the world.<sup>26</sup>

The expressions of reality to which 'nature' points make important contributions to modern nationhood. It is often in a country's 'natural landscapes', however defined, that quintessentially national virtues are thought to reside; or put another way, it is often thought that the qualities of a nation can be read from, or discovered in, its 'nature'.<sup>27</sup> In a recent Sri Lankan newspaper article, for example, one journalist proudly declared: 'Our breath-taking range of birds, animals and insects is woven into the fabric of our national life.'<sup>28</sup> It is precisely the pre-social realities to which a nation's 'nature' points that legitimate its own social, cultural and sexual norms. Social relations and cultural identities embedded organically in 'nature', or landscape, thus assume an air of immutability, as unchangeable as reality itself; identities endorsed by the nation become tied to the soil. In this sense, 'nature' must conceptually be invested with considerable political purchase and social power, for through nationally endorsed 'nature' the cultural politics of nationhood and identity are signified, at once created and reproduced, as well as contested. Thus, Ruhuna's 'nature' is a powerful tool whose Sinhala history and Buddhist philosophy are not merely palimpsests of a primordial and premodern antiquity, but map and signify Sri Lanka's exclusive topographies in the present, authorizing what is real and what is not.

No space is more representative of a nation's 'nature' than the national park, which intentionally frames, encapsulates and authorizes national and hegemonic ideologies and discourses of 'nature'.<sup>29</sup> National Parks represent quintessentially *national* virtues that help to legitimate claims to independent nationhood on the internationally recognized global stage of national emparkment, especially in former colonies. This global scale, however, merely voices to the world particular cultural and political expressions of 'nature' endorsed, even shaped, by individual states. Furthermore, on the global scale today, as well as a strong and inevitable emphasis on 'nature', there is a strong advocacy of the recognition of cultural components and the needs of local people in national park management policies.<sup>30</sup> Thus, in repeatedly emphasizing the 'nature' that is the primary hallmark of most national parks, it is but a short step for its cultural components to become naturalised. In the case of Sri Lanka, 'nature's' religious and historical inflections open the window for state-sponsored definitions of exclusivist Sinhala-Buddhist nationhood to be voiced in an international arena. As the Sri Lankan tourist board claims on its website: 'Sri Lanka has a rich and exotic variety of wildlife and a long tradition of conservation rooted in its 2230 year old Buddhist civilization.'<sup>31</sup>

In Ruhuna, the choice of whose interests are 'local', which cultural components should be sponsored and how the history of place is told literally embeds these social relations in 'nature', authorizing and assigning to them the hue of the real and the immutable. It is how Ruhuna's meanings have been shaped, and, importantly, how they have been experienced at the scale of the individual visitor, that this paper proceeds to explore in more depth. In what follows, I tease out the profusion of entangled events, actors and practices that have enacted 'nature' in Ruhuna, highlighting their continued significance to the politics of Sri Lankan nationhood and identity. First, I historicize the inscription and authorisation of Ruhuna's postcolonial 'nature'. Secondly, the paper draws attention to how the park's material 'nature' invokes Buddhist philosophy and discourses of the Buddhist body in the experiential moment. Thirdly, I discuss the foreclosure of other 'natures' within Ruhuna, thus raising important questions about the park's contested meanings.

## **Reinscribing Ruhuna's meaning**

### ***State-sponsored archaeology and epigraphy***

Tracing the inscription of meaning in Ruhuna National Park leads us initially to colonial Ceylon's Archaeological Survey Department. Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which archaeological practices construct the past, authorizing particular, often state-sanctioned interpretations and historical accounts of places and peoples.<sup>32</sup> Sri Lanka has a long tradition of state-sponsored archaeology and epigraphy (the science of deciphering ancient inscriptions), which has played a major role in authorizing and spatializing its Sinhala Buddhist historiography, and has also directly contributed to the naturalisation of exclusivist Sinhala history within Ruhuna National Park. Late nineteenth-century colonial exploration in Ceylon's inhospitable

south-eastern region revealed cave and rock inscriptions that were copied, photographed and brought to Colombo for analysis and translation.<sup>33</sup> A London-based 'eminent Orientalist', Dr Goldschmidt, led fieldwork and subsequent analysis in Colombo, with the intention of producing a philological publication, a '*Corpus Inscriptionum Zeilanicorum*', that it was hoped would shed light on ancient Ceylon.<sup>34</sup> It was this abundance of inscriptions and archaeological finds that sparked a more general interest in the previously neglected region. Inscriptions were messages and testaments, usually in Pali or ancient Sinhalese, engraved in the walls and ledges of rock caves and shelters formerly inhabited by Buddhist monks. Following Dr Goldschmidt's tireless work, an 1898 Archaeological Survey report identified the Hambantota District and land near the Yala Game Sanctuary as requiring further exploration because of its site as the former Ruhuna Kingdom.<sup>35</sup>

At about the same time, nineteenth-century 'racial' theories in colonial Ceylon were hierarchically positioning the Sinhalese 'race' above the Tamil. Transactions in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Ceylon* linked the Sinhalese to Aryan roots, and translation of the fifth-century Buddhist chronicle the *Mahavamsa* 'proved' that the Tamil presence in Ceylon was due to 'invasion' from South India.<sup>36</sup> Tamils, it seemed, had done nothing more than 'plunder' and 'ransack' Ceylon through the centuries,<sup>37</sup> and Goldschmidt's archaeological discoveries were being used as scientific 'proof' of the truth and reliability of the *Mahavamsa* as a historical document. From the text's obviously poetic diction and lyrical prose, 'real history' was read and imaginatively spatialized in areas such as Yala.

The appointment of Senerat Parnavitana as Ceylon's head of the Archaeological Survey Department marks a turning point in Yala's history. Parnavitana was an educated and trained epigraphist of Sinhalese descent. A religious man, he was clearly influenced by the previous 50 years or so of meticulous Orientalist scholarship by the likes of Goldschmidt, whose research suggested that Tamils were 'exotic' to Ceylon, whereas Sinhalese were 'natives' attached to Lankan soil. Whether or not Parnavitana's own brand of Sinhala nationalism was motivated by any racist intent is unclear and to some extent irrelevant. However, his administrative reports suggest a deep religious faith that convinced him of the need to continue to prove the truth-value of the *Mahavamsa* through the scientific tools at his disposal, archaeology and epigraphy. To Parnavitana these were not primarily a means of achieving nationalist aims but ways of testing and proving Ceylon's Sinhala-Buddhist history to the world and, perhaps more importantly, to himself. For example, of one of his early discoveries near Situlpahuwa, inside the Yala Game Sanctuary, he wrote: 'The inscription, therefore, is very interesting as evidence for the veracity of the *Mahavamsa*.'<sup>38</sup>

Congruent with renewed interest in rural Ceylonese landscapes emerging elsewhere in semi-independent state-council government policy,<sup>39</sup> the 1930s and 1940s saw Parnavitana initiate a new approach to state-sponsored archaeology that effectively reinscribed Yala's landscapes with the Sinhalese historical frameworks outlined in the *Mahavamsa*. An anti-colonialist, Parnavitana consciously attempted to take archaeological and epigraphical interest away from the metropolitan and colonial capital, Colombo, and back into the field, into those rural Ceylonese landscapes

where in past archaeological work countless inscriptions had been found only to be removed. His team embarked upon a colony-wide programme of archaeological survey that involved restoration and epigraphical translation *in situ*. They followed up on Goldschmidt's invitation to further explore the Yala Game Sanctuary. His approach effectively breathed life back into 'dead' archaeological ruins, thus charging their corresponding landscapes with profound new senses of time. For example, 1934 explorations in the southern part of the Uva Province and the parts of the Magam Pattu incorporated in the Yala Game Sanctuary revealed the ruins of Buddhist dwellings and temples referred to in the *Mahavamsa*, including Situlpahuwa and Akasachetiya.<sup>40</sup> Parnavitana's description of a second century BCE inscription found close to Situlpahuwa is telling: the tone amplifying the racialised politics that inhered in translations of the Mahavamsa's poetic renditions of Sinhala history:

An inscription under the drip ledge of a cave at Koravakgala, near Situlpavuva in the Magam Pattu, mentions a general (*senapati*), named Mita, of King Devanampiya Abhaya. It is possible to identify the King Abhaya of this record with Dutthagamani Abhaya, *the national hero of the Sinhalese*, and his general Mita with Nanda Mita, one of ten *legendary warriors who helped Dutthagamani to conquer the Tamils*.<sup>41</sup>

His words effectively equated Sinhala history with what he suggests was a legitimate, premodern Sinhala 'nation'. They grounded a contemporary, imagined Sinhalese 'national' community in both antiquity and place, configuring Yala as a space central to Sinhalese struggles with a dangerous Tamil Other. The reshaping of meanings that Yala developed under colonialism was beginning in earnest through the discovery and restoration of premodern archaeological remains in its midst. Precolonial historical memory was thought to reside in the landscape itself, and the Archaeological Survey had the scientific tools to allow this igneous history to speak for itself. That this historical memory was dangerously 'raced' has rarely been acknowledged. Other inscriptions included what Parnavitana believed were testaments that certain cave dwellings were gifts from Ruhuna's kings to resident Buddhist monk communities. These pointed to ownership claims that long predated colonial land proprietorship laws in Yala. Crown land was emphatically shown to have never been *terra nullis*. However, these historical proprietorship claims also precluded Tamil, Muslim or Burgher claims to any sort of rooted attachment to 'Lankan' soil. Changing perceptions of Yala, its spatiality and its diachronic framework, helped to decolonize the mind. No longer was this a hunting reserve of 'mostly forest and low jungle, infested with wild animals and fever haunted'.<sup>42</sup> Instead, it was emerging as the former kingdom Ruhuna, with rich connections to a glorious 2200 year-old Sinhala history that evoked battles with an invading Tamil Other.

### ***Changing perceptions of Ceylonese 'nature'***

In the realm of wildlife conservation, changing perceptions of the Yala Game Sanctuary first found governmental expression in the 1938 Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance. The ordinance was instrumental in initiating a change that saw the decline of

perceptions of Ceylon's fauna as 'game', now deemed an inappropriate term that implied animals should be preserved solely for the purposes of blood sport.<sup>43</sup> It gave birth to the modern national park system in Sri Lanka, recommending the dedication of parts of the island to wildlife so that species might live and breed with the minimum of human interference. Using a model developed in London, it divided areas such as Yala into three distinct categories: Strict Natural Reserves entirely dedicated to wildlife; National Parks to protect wildlife for the public to enjoy; and Intermediate Zones where strictly regulated game sports would be permitted. Significantly, however, congruent with Parnavitarna's efforts the ordinance further recommended the addition of a fourth category peculiar to Ceylon, 'Sanctuaries', which drew attention to the rich archaeological and religious discoveries being made across Ceylon:

We consider that these three classes are suitable for Ceylon, but we also feel that wildlife cannot be adequately protected without the introduction of a fourth. There are a number of places in which it would be of great advantage to prevent altogether the useless destruction of wildlife. We would include in such places several of the localities held especially sacred by Buddhists. In and around these places we feel that public sentiment would strongly favour the protection of wildlife. We cannot, however, constitute such areas as National Parks as a considerable part of the land is already in private hands. We, therefore, propose that a special law should run in such areas prohibiting except under definite conditions, the destruction of wildlife. We propose to term these areas Sanctuaries.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps more significant than the material boundary effects on Yala, this ordinance effectively set in motion state recognition of the confluence between wildlife and Buddhism. By making explicit the link between places considered 'sacred by Buddhists' (not Hindus, Muslims nor Christians, but exclusively Buddhists) and wildlife conservation, the wealth of Buddhist archaeological ruins being selectively renovated by Parnavitarna's Archaeological Survey Department could now effectively be embedded in Ceylon's 'nature' and natural landscapes.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, following the 1938 ordinance, the transformation of the Yala Game Sanctuary immediately created a national park that held in its midst an increasing number of restored Sinhala-Buddhist archaeological ruins as well as an abundance of translated inscriptions. Now Ruhuna National Park's 'nature' was more normatively Buddhist. Parnavitarna's rigorous island-wide programme of archaeological restoration had undoubtedly influenced the recommendations and ethos of the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance. From 1938 onwards, then, Ceylon's 'nature', particularly that in its newly established National Reserves such as Yala, was no longer unruly. The Archaeological Survey Department's administration reports through the 1940s and 1950s began to refer to the 'jungle' in positive terms. Similarly, in the early 1950s, the newly established Department of Wildlife Conservation's first reports immediately mobilized connections between the newly independent nation's 'nature' and the Sinhala-Buddhist histories to which emergent ruins, inscriptions and chronicles pointed:

Ceylon is probably unique in its possession of a historical background of Wild Life Protection extending uninterruptedly into the past 2000 years. It was the traditional duty of Sinhalese rulers, to give protection to wild beasts, birds and fishes, and the fulfilment of this duty is recorded in the Chronicles and inscriptions.<sup>46</sup>

Sinhala historiography and national wildlife conservation were now on their way to becoming well and truly married, such that in 1943 the park's name was changed to 'Ruhuna' in a bid to raise its profile in late colonial Ceylonese society.<sup>47</sup>

## **Rereading the poetics of meaning in Ruhuna National Park**

Having outlined the ways that Ruhuna National Park's meanings have been inscribed, this paper proceeds by exploring visitor negotiations of Ruhuna's 'nature' in more depth. Doing so sheds light on the ways that Ruhuna National Park's historical geography acts in the present, on how movement in and through Ruhuna's spaces effectively maps subjects, rendering subjectivities in relation to place and 'nature', ultimately crafting identities.

### ***Ruins, Ruhuna and connecting with history***

Let us return to the rocky outcrop of Akasachetiya in Block I of Ruhuna National Park, on the summit of which remain the partially restored ruins of a second century BCE Buddhist dagoba. At its base are caves that contain inscriptions just as old, and chronicles record that there was once a stairway leading to the top of the rock. In 1934, Parnavitana wrote that this site is 'connected with the legends of Dutthagamani, which state that in his previous birth as a *samaneri*, he acquired a store of religious merit by constructing flights of steps ascending to the courtyard of the *dagaba* at this place'.<sup>48</sup> This is one of the most popular ruin sites within the park, because its elevation affords fantastic vistas over Ruhuna. Steven Kemper suggests the powerful ways by which the renovation of Sinhala ruins across Sri Lanka contributes to 'enacting' Sinhala nationalism.<sup>49</sup> The careful scientific practice of restoring ancient piles of rubble to what archaeologists believe was once their original state makes it difficult to separate what is legitimately ancient from what is a modern reconstruction. This process infuses the present with an architectural and religious historical past. It renders landscape history visible, opening up that history to the realm of human experience. As Kemper suggests, in the experiential moment the 'blurring of past and present is the very thing that gives sacred places the palpable sense of their sacredness'.<sup>50</sup> Akasachetiya is just one of a number of sites in Block I of Ruhuna that have been restored to varying degrees. Here visitors are encouraged to alight from their vehicles. Here one feels a connection with the Sinhala history now embedded in Ruhuna's Buddhist 'nature'. Not only can visitors experience a palpable sense of sacredness at these sites, making present experiences feel like the 'glorious' and 'heroic' Sinhala past to which these ruins point, but these experiences take place in the midst of 'nature'. Embodied experience of these restored ruins point to expressions of reality located in the soil of this land, and consequently to expressions of identity endorsed, and authored, by the nation-state, legitimated by its very 'nature'. Here at Akasachetiya, the poetics of meaning are easily objectified, attributed to Sri Lanka's 'nature', and to its 'nature's' history.



In the Sinhala language, 'Akasachetiya' means 'dagoba of the sky'. Most place names in Ruhuna have a meaning in Sinhalese that can be connected to either Sinhala history or Buddhist philosophy. Furthermore, name boards and signposts within the park are always written in English and Sinhala, never in Tamil.<sup>51</sup> Naming and renaming places in the park often points to potent symbolic expressions that have since become woven into this national landscape. Indeed, changing the name of the park in 1943 from Yala to Ruhuna proved a most successful way of weaving the park's newly inscribed premodern and exclusivist profile into the Ceylonese public imagination. Renaming the park, and specific places within it, has also exerted an important influence on the poetics of landscape meaning. Naming and the development of human and mythological associations of place are central to endowing landscapes with meaning and significance. As such, renaming Ruhuna and naming places within the park were acts that restructured and inscribed territorial meaning, endowing places with the myths and history written in Sri Lanka's Sinhalese chronicles, especially the *Mahavamsa*. In the words of Yi-Fu Tuan:

At a more affective level, storytelling converts mere objects 'out there' into real presences. Myths have this power to an outstanding degree because they are not just any story but are foundational stories that provide support and glimmers of understanding for the basic institutions of society; at the same time, myths, by weaving in observable features in the landscape (a tree here, a rock there), strengthen a people's bond to place.<sup>52</sup>

Like stories, names also construct a pre-established geography telling us what one can make out of places; they are treatments of space.<sup>53</sup> Standing on top of Akasachetiya, just before my descent, it was easy to imagine that Dutthagemunu might have stood here in the second century BCE, gazing at the jungles of Ruhuna, his bastion and southern retreat, this 'twin cradle of Sinhalese civilization'. Perhaps he also bowed his head and raised his hands in obeisance to the Lord Buddha in front of the now ruinous dagoba – gestures I witnessed many other visitors perform here on Akasachetiya's summit.

### ***Culture/nature, Buddhist philosophy and the mobilization of the Buddhist body***

When talking of Buddhism in Tibet, Peter Bishop reminds us that the Tibetan language contained no word for 'Buddhism'. Tibetans did not traditionally think of themselves as Buddhists. Rather, the West invented Buddh-*ism*, as opposed to the religion practised by those who follow the teachings of Buddha, and whose beliefs and rituals merge indefinably into their local territory, folk customs and everyday practice.<sup>54</sup> The situation is of course different in Sri Lanka, and in Ruhuna, as identities are increasingly polarized even in peace time. However, Bishop's work serves as a reminder that in this place Buddhist philosophy is inseparable from the social: the sacred does not dwell uneasily on the edge of the social in Ruhuna.

Rereading Ruhuna's portal inscription it is clear that its message can be interpreted in different ways. The 'sacred gifts' to which it refers could easily be experienced by

Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or Christians. However, the overdetermination of Ruhuna's meanings, and the ways in which park experiences are written in popular Sri Lankan culture, suggest that the sacred gifts referred to – those 'national park experiences' that visitors are encouraged to acknowledge – are gifts bestowed through Buddhism. Ruhuna is a space not only where Sinhala history is woven into 'nature' but also where the overwhelming majority of popular accounts, at least those accessible in Sri Lanka's press and archives, suggest that experience is rooted in the Buddhist religious philosophy which goes hand in hand with that Sinhala history. In Ruhuna, Buddhist philosophy and discourse are mobilized in ways that have significantly reconfigured the separation of 'civilized' humans from 'savage nature' that pervaded Yala from its colonial inception. The park's 'latent' Buddhist 'nature' maps visitors' bodies in ways that instead give rise to those transcendent poetics of meaning, in which nature and culture are so often felt to merge, and that are considered by many as characteristic of Ruhuna National Park. Accounts of experience, textual and photographic representations and the various management strategies for shaping experience in Ruhuna can no doubt be variously interpreted. However, an understanding of the ways that Buddhist philosophy configures human relationships with the natural world suggest their underlying connection to 'Buddhist nature'.<sup>55</sup>

Buddhism draws some (perhaps unexpected) parallels with postmodern analysis that regards 'selfhood' as a construction of sorts.<sup>56</sup> Cartesian claims that 'man alone, under God, had a conscious mind, could "know himself" and so understand the meaning of things'<sup>57</sup> have constructed powerful philosophical and scientific traditions in 'the West' that regard humans as truly autonomous beings; selves bounded by skin and signified daily by the personal pronoun *I*. In Buddhism these discourses dissolve somewhat: the *I* – self-awareness – is seen as the product of craving and desire. It is the goal of the practising Buddhist to transcend the desires that create the 'self' by living a life of detachment from craving and desire. Self-awareness is seen as a pollution of naturalistic reality – the universe – into which the spirit is released upon transcendence of the self.

Buddhists view 'nature' as part of the same holistic reality into which humans are born. However, this is a reality that cannot be grasped by reason and logic alone. In Buddhist cosmologies, truth is not objective, it is intuitively experienced.<sup>58</sup> Enlightenment, or *Nirvana*, is a state of anaesthesia attained by purging the mind and body of sensuous cravings. It is said to induce an awareness whereby the true nature of reality is mindfully grasped. Whilst one can easily become attached to 'nature', it is also part of the vast natural truth that Buddhists aim intuitively to grasp through spiritual effort and experience. It is believed that the Lord Buddha loved the beauty of 'nature', and it has also been noted how early Buddhist literature writes the forest as a mysterious presence, blending solemnity, majesty and attractiveness.<sup>59</sup> Amongst Buddhists, then, 'nature' and natural beauty have long been accepted as aids to spiritual effort; indeed, the natural environment is often regarded as the ideal place for cultivating spiritual insights into Buddhism.<sup>60</sup> In Japan, for example, Tendai Buddhist monks conduct 'thousand-day pilgrimages' around Mount Hiei in order to reach a state of 'oneness with nature', thus returning them to an unfeeling point of balance within the natural world.<sup>61</sup> This has profound implications for landscape experience in Ruhuna National Park;

a quintessentially Sinhala-Buddhist place. Even though the majority of Ruhuna's visitors are lay Buddhists – indeed, many are not even Buddhists at all – there is ample evidence that the potency of this place in the Buddhist imagination evokes similar such relationships between visitor and Ruhuna's 'nature'. It is worth emphasizing, for example, that the Sinhala language contains no direct translation for the words 'landscape' or 'nature', thus suggesting that linguistically at least the Sinhala-Buddhist subject cannot easily be separated from the natural world.

There are implications from this relating to the use of bodily senses in experiencing Ruhuna's 'nature'. In order to make sense of reality, the 'Buddhist body' affords less emphasis on the vision, visual acuity, image and spectacle that many scholars suggest characterize contemporary relationships between the European or American body and place or nature.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the 'Buddhist body' relies equally on intuition and multi-sensual engagements with place in order to grasp the 'universal truth'. Buddhist discourse classifies the mind as a sixth sense, an aggregate of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.<sup>63</sup> The mind is also the receptacle for intuitive glimpses of the meaning of reality when the subject purges the body of sensuous attachments to things in this world. The mind knows when the self is close to being undone. The Buddhist body, thus, has a wholly 'natural' sixth sense, and importantly, this 'similarity of sensuous worlds shared within cultures'<sup>64</sup> can be read from popular accounts of experience in Ruhuna National Park.

Over the last three decades newspaper articles, features and essays in wildlife journals have increasingly represented 'nature' and national park experiences in ways that draw upon Buddhist relationships between the subject and natural world, thus freely mobilizing connections between historical memory, Buddhism and subjectivity. For example, a 1996 essay in *Loris*, entitled 'Wildlife in the Jataka', dealt with contemporary concerns over wildlife conservation in Sri Lanka by tracing the links between Sri Lankan fauna and the Jataka tales (birth stories of the Buddha). Published at a time when *Loris* foregrounded scientific and ecological research, the essay promulgated Buddhist beliefs that orthodox scientific theories, such as Darwinism, ecological science and environmentalism, are merely independent discoveries of the vast natural truth to which Buddhism points. Furthermore, not only did the essay suggest that humankind cannot be separated from 'nature', it also grounded this marriage of culture and 'nature' in the Buddhist antiquity of an unspecified group of 'forebears' cognate with the Sinhala 'nation'.

Going back to a literature [the Jataka tales] such as the one I have referred to will, on the contrary, serve to show how immediate man's relationship with bird and beast had been in our antiquity, and how much familiarity our forebears had with them, then as to have led to the imagining of the many beast-fables as are found in the collection. If anything, it goes to show how truly naturalist, if also spontaneous and unconscious in this, they had been in their villages and cultivations hemmed in by the wild...<sup>65</sup>

Popular newspaper accounts through the 1980s and 1990s also drew similar connections between Buddhism, 'nature' and the 'nation'. The *Daily News* ran a regular series of photo-essays entitled '...my own native land', which provided short

accounts of an aspect of Sri Lankan wildlife accompanied by one or two photographs. Many were about, or based in, Ruhuna National Park. Typical of such pieces, the example shown in Figure 4 endows Ruhuna with its own mysterious personality, thus echoing early Buddhist scriptures and invoking Ruhuna's quite particular religious and historical connections by declaring: 'This vast, desolate plain is interspersed, with scrub jungle and cavernous rock outcrops. History lies buried in its sands and mystery lurks behind its trees.'<sup>66</sup>

The superimposition of the title, '...my own native land', over a blackened representation of the whole island of Sri Lanka connects Ruhuna's Sinhala-Buddhist 'nature' with an island-wide discourse of 'nativeness', effectively precluding non-Sinhala-Buddhist Sri Lankan 'natures'. Ruhuna National Park was now being written in ways that implied the potent relationships between Sinhala history, Buddhist philosophy and a reified group of Sri Lankans cognate with a Sinhala nation. The



FIGURE 4 Example of '...my own native land'. (Source: *Daily News* (3 March 1990), clippings file on 'Yala', ANCL Newspaper Archive, Lake House, Colombo.)

tranquillity, beauty and serenity characteristic of popular visitor experiences in Ruhuna pointed to a religious exclusivism that was now invested in the park's soil, thus ensuring that these spatial experiences were never far from ethnically absolute trajectories of Sri Lankan nationhood. For example, one writer's evocative poesis of 'Dusk at Yala', printed in *The Island* newspaper in 1992, powerfully evokes the mindful and intuitive comprehension of the vast natural truth characteristic of a Buddhist body's experience in Ruhuna National Park:

Still calmness stands alongside the trees.  
The sky darkens.  
Darkness envelopes all around.  
All is still.  
One with the universe.<sup>67</sup>

Here the relationship between soil and subjectivity is crucial. If it were not for Ruhuna's by now institutionalized and overdetermined Sinhala-Buddhist landscape history, the meanings of this poem might be more open to interpretation from both Hindus and Buddhists alike. However, as this paper has shown, well before this piece was written Ruhuna National Park's connections with both Sinhala history and Buddhism were being objectified, woven into the fabric of the 'natural' landscape. Experiences in the park continue to be shaped by this heady mix of religion and history invested in soil, stone and tree, but experienced by the individual subject. Even in accounts devoid of Buddhist referents, the place itself is charged with fostering heightened relationships between body and environment that mobilize an implicit connection to Buddhism. For example, in another 1994 *Loris* essay, 'The lure of the jungle', the author makes no explicit reference to Buddhism, but nevertheless suggests that Ruhuna's jungles are '[a] place where the verdure of vegetation closes in like balm to soothe and heal the irritations and irrationalities encountered in life'.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the textuality of such sources, they suggest ways that the park's Sinhala-Buddhist histories, shaped through archaeological practices and wildlife conservation policy, work to mobilize the Buddhist philosophy and discourse that so strongly pervade Sri Lankan society. If the inscription of Buddhist 'nature' and Sinhala history have together restructured the park's meaning over the last 70 or so years, then corporeal experience powerfully continues to invigorate and sustain these discourses and meanings in ways inextricably linked to a cultural politics of identity. Experiencing Ruhuna National Park's 'nature' connects one to a premodern exclusivist Sinhala history in a modern nation-state that simultaneously attempts to manage religious and 'racial' plurality. Being in Ruhuna is thus about being Sri Lankan on particular terms that subsume Tamil, Muslim and Burgher ethnicities within a Sinhala hegemony. Its 'nature' has both intuitive meaning that shapes ways of being in place, and an expressive character of its own that serves to objectify – to 'nature'-alize – the park's materiality. Chris Tilley suggests that this union of subjectivity and objectivity in landscape produces loci for existence; although the topology of land remains distinct from thought, the two play into each other, creating an intelligible landscape, a spatialization

of being.<sup>69</sup> The poetics of meaning come to be embedded in and attributed to not only place but also what is regarded as Ruhuna's quintessentially Sri Lankan and (crucially) quintessentially Sinhala-Buddhist 'nature'. The feeling of either subjectively connecting or not with Ruhuna's 'nature' thus has a strong relationship to fostering senses of belonging in this nationally endorsed space.

### ***Modernity and experience: postcolonial tensions***

Today, however, a number of park rules and regulations apparently contravene such readings by actually causing marked separations between body and environment: notably, rules confining visitors to vehicles while touring the park's network of dirt tracks, and the provision of circuit bungalows inside Ruhuna for visitors. Whilst both imply a highly mediated and modern way of separating body (Buddhist or otherwise) from Ruhuna's 'nature', their history actually reveals efforts to engineer more immediate connections with wildlife. Vehicle bound wildlife experiences (e.g. Figure 2) can of course be read as a highly regulated human relationship with the non-human world. In such moments, as we crane our necks to peer at fauna from within cars, we would be forgiven for thinking that '[t]he two concepts, nature and culture, can only exist in dialectical relation to one another'.<sup>70</sup> However, 1940s decisions on vehicular confinement were made as it was noted how animals were less afraid of visitors in vehicles. This form of separation of body from landscape in fact was intended to foster a more immediate relationship between park visitor and 'nature'. Management decisions, of course, never intended to create ascetic, forest dwelling experiences; however, it was always intended that spatial practices such as vehicle bound touring and lodging in prefabricated circuit bungalows might enable as many Sri Lankans to experience as much of Ruhuna's 'nature' as possible.

Such a regulation of movement through, and encounter with, Ruhuna's 'nature' also privileges visual perception. Seeing has been variously referred to as a particularly 'Western' mode of embodiment associated with fragmentary and detached modes of being.<sup>71</sup> However, it does not appear that such draconian separations of the body from Ruhuna's landscapes have detracted from what are often considered sacred, tranquil or even serene 'jungle' experiences. I recall, for example, being driven bumpily through a fairly dense piece of secondary forest in Ruhuna, over a pot-holed road ravaged by recent monsoons, when my Sinhala-Buddhist travel companion stressed how this was the type of jungle she loved to just *be* in. In current management strategies an 'observation versus sighting' approach to visitor experience is fostered, the intention of which is to 'enhance satisfaction by observing and correlating with animal behaviour and habitat', whilst simultaneously preserving the 'serenity of nature'.<sup>72</sup>

This hybrid management terminology, blending the science of ecology with the transcendent poetics of Ruhuna's 'nature', speaks more broadly of postcolonial tensions between Ruhuna's colonialist roots and its contemporary Buddhist spatialities and meanings. Such tensions also reveal themselves when one traces the colonial history and tradition of the 'circuit bungalow' within the park, whose presence and form was



repeated in national parks throughout the British empire. The contemporary circuit bungalow in Ruhuna, however, is best described as a postcolonial interpretation in which traces of the colonial linger. It exhibits elements of the 'critical vernacularism' which Nihal Perera suggests employs 'indigenous and historic spatial concepts, elements, [and] architectural details'.<sup>73</sup> Its open, low walls, verandahs and simple furnishings make it difficult to distinguish outside from inside, and painstaking efforts are made to ensure the structures blend into surrounding parkland. Such postcolonial tensions require a recasting of what is meant by the separation of body from landscape in Ruhuna National Park. Seeing from within the confines of a vehicle, or lodging in one of the park's circuit bungalows, actually facilitate ways of connecting with the 'natural' world in Ruhuna National Park. As one journalist, Sharmini Rodrigo, said of her recent stay in a popular circuit bungalow in Yala:

The very location of the bungalow, its very structure – incorporating large tree trunks and wood, the design which seemed so right for jungle living, all this plus the jungle sounds at night, the breeze that rattled through the woven tats, the bliss of 'being – being there to savour it'.<sup>74</sup>

## Contesting Ruhuna's 'natures'

The focus of this paper thus far inevitably raises questions about alternative ways of experiencing Ruhuna's 'nature'. That the overwhelming majority of accounts archived in Sri Lanka point to experiences that mobilize Buddhist discourse does not, of course, preclude the production of other 'natures' that cut against the grain of the subjectivities that this paper explores. Indeed, subaltern theory has alerted us to the importance of uncovering the silences and suppressed minority narratives in postcolonial negotiations of historical archives.<sup>75</sup> It is not the intention of this paper to address head-on the subjectivities of specific non-Buddhist Tamils, Muslims or Burghers in Ruhuna National Park. It is, however, entirely necessary to pose the question of whether it is possible for Tamil wildlife enthusiasts, for example, to 'cut through' Ruhuna's layers of Sinhala-Buddhist meaning in order to enjoy wholly secular negotiations of the park's 'nature', or to attach their own non-Buddhist sacredness to Ruhuna's 'nature'? To phrase this differently, it is important heuristically to ask what sort of non-Sinhala bodies are composed in and through Ruhuna National Park's 'nature'.

In this and other respects Ruhuna's 'nature' is, of course, contested. Sharmini Rodrigo's editorial quoted above, which refers to the Yala Bungalow, is actually a requiem for its loss. On 14 June 1996, the bungalow was set ablaze by LTTE terrorists. Chased by their attackers, its 10 visitors escaped unhurt. At the time all but Block I of Ruhuna National Park had been closed to the public for some time. This was the latest of a small number of isolated LTTE raids in Yala. The LTTE presence in Sri Lanka's most popular national park effectively transformed this 'national treasure' to a landscape of fear for many. Apprehension was heightened by the mid-1990s because the Yala Protected Area Complex contained in its midst the border that marked the southern most extent of the LTTE's imaginary homeland, 'Eelam' (Figure 5). Concealed bays and dense jungles along Ruhuna's East Coast provided the perfect cover for illicit guerrilla

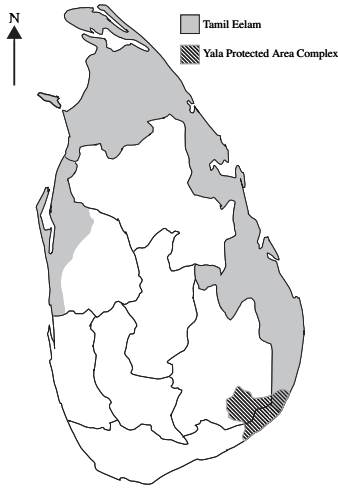


FIGURE 5 Map showing 'Tamil Eelam', Sri Lanka and Yala Protected Area Complex.

arms shipments from South India. Ruhuna National Park's hegemonic meanings were being gradually subverted as its unprotected jungles were reported to be 'rebel-infested'.<sup>76</sup>

The closure of parts of the park, the loss of the bungalows and the mere presence of the LTTE in Ruhuna crucially meant that the types of experience outlined in this paper were placed in jeopardy. Sharmini Rodrigo's requiem for the Yala Bungalow proceeds:

The heart is full of anguish when I think that I will never stand at that self same upstairs deck, looking out over jungle, scrub and river.

That I will never stand in that long bedroom shaded by the magnificent trees and look out at the Menik ganga flowing on its peaceful way.<sup>77</sup>

Her anguish is both symbolic and affective. It is an anguish for which the LTTE are responsible. The foreclosure of the types of experience that she celebrates earlier in her piece is a direct result of the LTTE attack, and once again Ruhuna becomes central to the Sinhalese struggle against a dangerous Tamil Other. The threat that the LTTE posed to Ruhuna National Park was thus popularly regarded as simultaneously both real and symbolic. Symbolic because this space, so central to the imagined geography of a historical Sinhala nation, was fast becoming 'infested' by separatists who disputed the very legitimacy and historical justification of an island-wide Sri Lankan nationhood. And real because Sri Lankan citizens' access to this space, their ability to connect physically with Ruhuna's Sinhala history and to experience its Buddhist 'nature', was diminished. Unsurprisingly, then, in Sri Lanka's popular press these anxieties figured the LTTE presence as more than just a practical problem with financial repercussions for the Department of Wild Life. One journalist, for example, suggested that, now, the 'sword of Damocles hangs threateningly over Sri Lanka's favourite national park'.<sup>78</sup> Another

evoked the classic Buddhist motif of 'lotus-laden wewas' that helped to make the unmistakable 'character of Yala', before declaring: 'As the shadow of the Tigers draws its cloak over Yala's wild corridors, we are left with our precious memories and a few enchanted names...'<sup>79</sup>

And so it was the military who were charged with the task of once again securing Ruhuna National Park. In 1997 soldiers were posted around the various Blocks, but particularly in Block I, to calm any fears that visitors might have of ambush whilst touring the park. Up to the nationwide cease-fire in 2002, the presence of soldiers remained deliberately conspicuous, offering visual reassurance that Sri Lanka's foremost National Park is indeed protected by the appointed guardians of national security. Ruhuna's Sinhala history and Buddhist 'nature' were now militarized, and there is ample evidence of the appreciation of the army's efforts. Two journalists enthusiastically reported in 1997 how soldiers asked them 'cursory, polite but searching'<sup>80</sup> questions to establish their identities before allowing them to proceed to the ticketing booth. Pronouncing Ruhuna safe again in 1998 was as much an exercise in conquering spatial imaginaries as it was an exercise in restricting LTTE activity in Yala. Only in 2003 was Block II reopened; all the others remain closed to this day. Securing Ruhuna was about securing, once again, the enchanting landscape experiences so valued by its visitors; it was about securing a poetics of meaning as much as securing material landscape. However, the militarization of the park – those 'cursory, polite but searching questions' that an overwhelmingly Sinhalese army asked in order to establish every visitor's identity, ethnicity and intention – raises questions about how comfortable non-Sinhalese Sri Lankans, particularly Tamils, feel when visiting Ruhuna National Park.

## **Conclusion: other 'natures'?**

This paper has sought to demonstrate how a poetics of meaning in Ruhuna National Park is heavily implicated in the (re)creation of 'racialized' difference and political enmity in Sri Lanka. It has suggested the necessity of thinking about movement through space, i.e. spatial intuition amidst Ruhuna National Park's authorized 'nature', as political in itself. To do so is to stop the false separation of the apparently benign and enchanting poetics of experience in Ruhuna from Sri Lanka's troubled cultural politics of identity and nationhood. By now, it should be clear how the cultural geographies of Ruhuna National Park connect the body with Sinhalese foundational histories and Buddhist discourses of 'nature' which continually and contentiously evoke the exclusive parameters of the modern Sri Lankan nation-state. To feel the powerful deployment of soil, stone and tree in Ruhuna National Park is also to shape 'raced' and territorialized senses of belonging in Sri Lanka; it is to root identities in Nature.

In tracing together the reinscription of Ruhuna National Park's meanings and the poetics of popular park experience, this paper has proposed a perspective that privileges the role of the body and embodiment in accessing reality, but simultaneously

recognizes the historical and cultural contexts in and through which bodies and subjectivities are produced. This explicitly anti-essentialist approach ultimately challenges us to recognize that embodied identities, sense of self and other, are produced in and through our entangled encounters and negotiations of a value-laden world.<sup>81</sup> It is the inflection of those values which marginalize and variously exclude. Despite the immutability of Ruhuna National Park's 'nature', despite those meanings apparently buried deep in its soil, stone and tree, the door is open for other 'natures', other more equitable and inclusive 'natures' with which all Sri Lankans can connect.<sup>82</sup>

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All photographs were taken by me.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> H.S. Panwar and W.M.R.S. Wickeramasinghe, *Management Plan Yala Protected Area Complex [Ruhuna National Park Block I to V, Yala Strict Natural Reserve, and Kataragama, Katagamuwu and Nimalawa Sanctuaries], Plan period: 1998–2007, Vol. 1* (Colombo, Department of Wildlife Conservation records room, 1997).
- <sup>2</sup> For a more sustained and reflexive account of one researcher's participation and postcolonial critique of nature-based tourism, see B. Braun, *The intemperate rainforest: nature, culture and power on Canada's west coast* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002), ch. 4.
- <sup>3</sup> For an account of the relative benefits of 'covert' research practices, see H. Parr, 'Feeling, reading and making bodies in space', *Geographical review* **91** (2001), pp. 158–67. During the course of this research, my own intentions were never to efface my own presence in social situations I had to some extent constructed. Rather, they were attempts to place myself in situations where I thought I could best understand, and gain insight into, common landscape experience in and of Ruhuna.
- <sup>4</sup> *Papers relating to the working of the Game Ordinance, No. 6 of 1872*, by the Assistant Government Agent of Tangalle, Ceylon, Mr. F.C. Fisher (National Archives, London, CO57/84, n.d. but c.1873/4).
- <sup>5</sup> For a detailed exploration of how colonialism and 'the hunt' were ideologically and materially linked to one another, see J. MacKenzie, *The empire of nature: hunting, conservation and British imperialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988).

- <sup>6</sup> S. Whatmore, *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces* (London, Sage, 2002), p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Drawing upon postcolonial cultural geography in particular here invites contemplation of the ways that colonial encounters and mappings produce the very spatial fabric in, with and through which post-independent and contemporary politics are lived and negotiated. Following Jane Jacobs's observations on 'postcolonial cities', at their most fundamental (Ruhuna's) colonial legacies provide the agreed points of reference, the 'maps which define the architecture of "here" and "there"'; J. Jacobs, *The edge of empire: postcolonialism and the city* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 21. Along with other post-colonial geographers, Jacobs suggests the importance of conceiving of the history of spatiality in any historical inquiry itself. See also P. Carter, *The road to Botany Bay: an essay in spatial history* (London, Faber & Faber, 1987); J. Sidaway, 'Postcolonial geographies: an exploratory essay', *Progress in human geography* **24** (2000), pp. 591–612; C. Nash, 'Cultural geography: postcolonial cultural geographies', *Progress in human geography* **26** (2002), pp. 219–30; B. Yeoh, 'Postcolonial cities', *Progress in human geography* **25** (2001), pp. 456–68.
- <sup>8</sup> See N. de Lanrole, *A reign of ten kings: Sri Lanka – the World, 500BC–1200AD* (Colombo, Ceylon Tourist Board, 1999), pp. 41–48.
- <sup>9</sup> Sri Lankan Burghers descend from mixed Portuguese, Dutch and 'native' ancestry. All population statistics taken from T. Somasekaram *et al.*, eds, *Arjuna's atlas of Sri Lanka* (Dehiwela, Sri Lanka, Arjuna's Consulting Company Limited, 1997), pp. 47–52.
- <sup>10</sup> Prior to 1972 Sri Lanka was called Ceylon. The name 'Sri Lanka' derives from the Sinhalese language and roughly translates as 'sacred or holy "Lanka"', where Lanka is the Pali word used to refer to the whole island in translated Buddhist scriptures. Up to 1972, other policies and tactics that effectively led to the creation of a non-secular, Sinhala-Buddhist state included the implementation of Sinhalese (over English and Tamil) as the national language, educational reforms that divided schools into Sinhalese and Tamil streams and university admission policies that privileged ethnicity over intellectual achievement. For more detailed social histories, see K.M. de Silva, *A history of Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1981); V. Samaraweera, *Sri Lanka* (Oxford, Clio Press, 1987).
- <sup>11</sup> The civil war began in 1983, following race riots in southern Sri Lanka where Sinhalese lynch mobs burned and looted known Tamil houses, in response to an LTTE attack on a group of Sinhala-Buddhist monks in the north of the country. The war represented the culmination of ethnicized tensions that had been bubbling for decades prior to the 1983 riots. It is estimated that some 60 000 Sri Lankans of all races lost their lives during the war, and over 500 000 (mostly Tamils located in the north) lost their homes and were forced to flee the country; L. Marshall, 'Sri Lanka 2003: players in search of solutions', *Polity* **1** (2003), p. 20. For critiques of the Sinhala-Buddhist state in the years leading up to and during the war, see S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism betrayed: religion, politics and violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992).
- <sup>12</sup> Portal inscription at Ruhuna National Park.
- <sup>13</sup> A *dagoba* is a Buddhist stupa, the dome-shaped main structure of most Buddhist temples.
- <sup>14</sup> From the 1940s onwards, Sri Lanka's national parks have been strongly marketed for a host of reasons. Elsewhere, I have situated such campaigns within the post-independent politics and strategies of nation-building by suggesting that such vigorous promotion was connected to the promotion and spatialization of appropriate types of citizenship by a saturation of Ceylon's peripheral landscapes with a body politic; see T. Jazeel, 'Being Sri Lankan: three cultural geographies' (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2002), pp. 76–101.

- <sup>15</sup> C. Selwyn Samaraweera, 'Yala in history', *Loris* **12** (1970), p. 18.
- <sup>16</sup> 'The silent living of Ruhuna National Park: Yala', *Loris* **12** (1970), p. 76 (emphasis added).
- <sup>17</sup> For examples, see R. Williams, *Culture* (London, Fontana, 1980); K. Soper, *What is nature?* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1995); W. Cronon, 'Introduction: in search of nature', in W. Cronon, ed., *Uncommon ground: toward reinventing nature* (New York, Norton, 1995), pp. 23–68; N. Castree and B. Braun, 'The construction of nature and the nature of construction: analytical and political tools for building survivable futures', in B. Braun and W. Castree, eds, *Remaking reality: nature at the millennium* (London, Routledge, 1998), pp. 3–42.
- <sup>18</sup> D. Cosgrove, 'Ideas and culture: a response to Don Mitchell. Exchange there's no such thing as culture?', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **21** (1996), p. 575.
- <sup>19</sup> K. Soper, 'Nature/"nature"', in G. Robertson et al. eds., *Future natural: nature/science/culture* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 26. Also see N. Smith, 'Nature at the millennium: production and re-enchantment', in Braun and Castree, *Remaking reality*, pp. 271–85.
- <sup>20</sup> Cronon, 'Introduction: in search of nature', p. 36.
- <sup>21</sup> Although Jennifer Light provides a provocative example of 'natures' that do not possess a conventional substantive element in her discussion of virtual computer generated nature. See Light, 'The changing nature of nature', *Ecumene* **4** (1997), pp. 181–95.
- <sup>22</sup> N. Carrol, 'On being moved by nature: between religion and natural history', in S. Kemal and I. Gaskell eds, *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 244–67.
- <sup>23</sup> B. Braun, 'Querying posthumanisms', *Geoforum* **35** (2004), p. 271.
- <sup>24</sup> S. Pile and N. Thrift, 'Mapping the subject', in S. Pile and N. Thrift, eds, *Mapping the subject: geographies of cultural transformation* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 27. Also see N. Thrift, *Spatial formations* (London, Sage, 1996), ch. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> See Braun, 'Querying posthumanisms'; Whatmore, *Hybrid geographies*, esp. ch. 1–3.
- <sup>26</sup> Castree and Braun, 'Constructions of nature and the nature of construction', p. 17.
- <sup>27</sup> Eric Kaufman refers to the legitimation of social relations and national virtues through 'nature' as 'naturalizing the nation'. See Kaufman, '"Naturalizing the nation": the rise of naturalistic nationalism in the United States and Canada', *Comparative studies in society and history* **40** (1998), pp. 666–95. Also see O. Zimmer, 'In search of national identity: Alpine landscape and the reconstruction of the Swiss nation', *Comparative studies in society and history* **40** (1998), pp. 637–64.
- <sup>28</sup> S. Buczaki, 'All creatures great and small', unknown Sri Lankan newspaper from clippings file on 'Yala' (Department of Wildlife Conservation archives, Colombo, 2000).
- <sup>29</sup> Much has been written on the links between National Parks and nationhood. For North American examples, see D. Cosgrove, 'Habitable earth: wilderness, empire and race in America', in D. Rothenburg, ed., *Wild ideas* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 27–41; for British examples, see D. Cosgrove, B. Roscoe and S. Rycroft, 'Landscape and identity at Ladybower reservoir and Rutland', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **21** (1996), pp. 534–51.
- <sup>30</sup> For example, guidelines laid out by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the 1992 Caracas Convention that urged countries to manage their nature in a manner sensitive to local people.
- <sup>31</sup> Sri Lankan Tourist Board, [www.lanka.net/ctb/nationalpark.html](http://www.lanka.net/ctb/nationalpark.html)
- <sup>32</sup> Far from the apolitical practice of unearthing buried history and revealing its uncontaminated forms to an eagerly waiting public, archaeological practices have come to be seen as politically charged authorizations and endorsements whose objectification and assumed neutrality define the very parameters for thinking about origins and identity. By constructing and authorizing



teleological historical frameworks, archaeology just as easily defines who 'we' are as it does who 'they' are. For examples, see P.R. Schmidt and T.R. Patterson, eds, *Making alternative histories: the practice of archaeology and history in non-western settings* (Santa Fe, NM, School of American Research Press, 1995); D. Miller, M. Rowlands and C. Tilley, eds, *Domination and resistance* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1989); and D. Miller and C. Tilley, eds, *Identity, power and pre-history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984).

- <sup>33</sup> Many inscriptions and other archaeological artifacts were displayed in Colombo's newly constructed museum of 1877, whose vogueish Georgian architectural style, as Nihal Perera suggests, symbolically framed the appropriation of the 'native' culture by the dominant colonising one. Perera also suggests that as the island colony developed into a strategic node in the South Asian and Far Eastern British Empire, the institutions, buildings and size of operations in the port capital, Colombo, were disproportionate to the needs of the island and the city at the time. This explains the colonial government's enthusiasm for bringing artefacts and inscriptions from the Southeast to Colombo for analysis and display. See Perera, *Society and space: colonialism, nationalism and postcolonial identity in Sri Lanka* (Boulder, Co, Westview Press, 1998), pp. 75–85.
- <sup>34</sup> *Address of His Excellency, the Right Honorable W.H. Gregory on closing the session of the Legislative Council*, 6 Jan. 1875 (National Archives, London CO57/64).
- <sup>35</sup> *Report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon for 1897*, by F.T. Hobson, R.S. Colombo, W.T. Taylor and F. Modder, 1898 (National Archives, London CO57/138).
- <sup>36</sup> M. Angell, 'Understanding the Aryan theory', in M. Tiruchelvam and C.S. Datthathreya, eds, *Culture and politics of identity in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 1998), pp. 41–72.
- <sup>37</sup> Angell, 'Understanding the Aryan theory', p. 58.
- <sup>38</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon for 1934*, Senarat Parnavitana Esq. (National Archives, London CO57/241).
- <sup>39</sup> For example, 'back to the land'-style *Agriculture and Patriotism* schemes attempted to settle educated, middle-class – mostly Sinhalese – Ceylonese on rural land development projects. The government's aims were to boost the colony's agricultural production whilst symbolically infusing colonial Ceylon's neglected rural landscapes with a Ceylonese body politic. See D.S. Senanayake, *Agriculture and patriotism*, ed. D.S. Senanayake (Sri Lanka, Sridevi, 1999, 1st edn 1935). Catherine Nash has written on the geographies of anti-colonial Irish masculinity and nationhood proposed through similar projects in early twentieth-century Ireland. See Nash, 'Men again: Irish masculinity, nature and nationhood in the early twentieth century', *Ecumene* 3 (1996), pp. 427–53.
- <sup>40</sup> Both Situlpahuwa and Akasachetiya are, of course, popular restored, sacred places within Ruhuna National Park today.
- <sup>41</sup> *Annual report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon for 1934*, Senarat Parnavitana (emphasis added).
- <sup>42</sup> *Papers relating to the Game Ordinance, No.6 of 1872*, by the Assistant Government Agent of Tangalle, F.C. Fisher (as quoted in n. 2).
- <sup>43</sup> *Report of the Fauna and Flora Protection Committee*, by C.V. Brayne (Chairman), W.E. Wait, H.L. Dowbiggin, A.B. Lushington, Lucius Nicholls, A.J. Wickwar, 20 Aug. 1934 (National Archives, London CO57/243).
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> This is only one reading of this important piece of fauna and flora legislation that draws specific attention to its role in shaping a Ceylonese historical geography of national emparkment. I am grateful to other historical geographers who have drawn my attention to

alternative and complementary readings that highlight e.g. global and international networks and discourses of national emparkment contemporaneous with this legislation, or the preservation and translation of the increasingly marginalized hunting rights of a privileged elite heavily involved in drafting this legislation. Whilst acknowledging such alternative historical interpretations, this paper focuses specifically on the creation of Ceylon's/Sri Lanka's 'sacred nature', and therefore chooses not to pursue such alternative interpretations in any great depth here.

<sup>46</sup> *Administration Report of the Warden, Department of Wildlife for 1951*, by C.W. Nicholas, July 1952 (National Archives, London DO109/25).

<sup>47</sup> Just 10 years later, in 1954, the Department of Wildlife reported the apparent 'discovery of a herd of Sinhala wild cattle in Ruhuna National Park'. It seems that even the park's fauna were now being racialized. *Administration report of the Warden, Department of Wildlife for 1953*, by C.W. Nicholas, May 1954 (National Archives, London DO109/27).

<sup>48</sup> *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon for 1934*, Senarat Parnavitana.

<sup>49</sup> S. Kemper, *The presence of the past: chronicles, politics and culture in Sinhala life* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1991). See ch. 5, 'Races and places'.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Catherine Nash highlights the troubling implications of postcolonial renaming programmes. The apparent celebration of 'cultural re-appropriation, resistance, recovery and reclamation', by renaming, unproblematically assumes a 'pure homogenous, pre-colonial culture suppressed by colonialism'. Such assumptions edit claims of attachment and belonging that minority groups (in this case Sri Lanka's Tamils, Muslims and Burghers) might have to places given new names that mobilize hegemonic 'postcolonial' narratives of nationhood. See Nash, 'Irish placenames: post-colonial locations', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **24** (1999), p. 463.

<sup>52</sup> Y.-F. Tuan, 'Language and the making of place: a narrative-descriptive approach', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **81** (1991), p. 686. On myth and memory, nature and landscape also see S. Schama, *Landscape and memory* (New York, Knopf, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> M. de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), p. 122.

<sup>54</sup> P. Bishop, *Dreams of power: Tibetan Buddhism and the western imagination* (London, Athlone Press, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> There is a wealth of literature that outlines and explores in detail the ways that Buddhist philosophy and religion construct a cosmology or way of being in the world. This paper can only skim the surface of this literature. For some examples of more in-depth exploration, see A. Kaplan, *The new world of philosophy* (New York, Vintage, 1961), ch. 7; M. Wickramasinghe, *Buddhism and culture* (Sri Lanka, Tisara Prakasakayo, 1981); and A. Guruge, *Buddhism: the religion and its culture* (Colombo, World Fellowship of Buddhists, 1984).

<sup>56</sup> J. Pickering, 'Selfhood is a process', in J. Pickering, ed., *The authority of experience: essays on Buddhism and psychology* (Richmond, Middlesex, Curzon; 1997), p. 163.

<sup>57</sup> R. Porter, 'Introduction', in R. Porter, ed., *Re-writing the self: histories from the Renaissance to the present* (London, Routledge, 1997). On Cartesian dualism and the 'self' see Peter Burke's essay in the same collection: 'Representation of the self from Petrarch to Descartes', pp. 17–29.

<sup>58</sup> Wickramasinghe, *Buddhism and culture*, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> B. Goven Gokhale, 'Aesthetic ideas in early Buddhism', *Ancient Ceylon* **3** (1979), p. 137. This themed edition of the journal of Sri Lanka's Archaeological Survey Department

- collated papers given at the 2nd annual conference on Asian archaeology, held in Colombo, 1966.
- <sup>60</sup> M. Batchelor, 'Even the stones smile: selections from scriptures', in M. Batchelor and K. Brown, eds, *Buddhism and ecology* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. 13.
- <sup>61</sup> See W.S. Yokoyama, 'Circling the mountain: observations on the Japanese way of life', in Batchelor and Brown, *Buddhism and ecology*, pp. 55–64.
- <sup>62</sup> Kay Anderson traces the emergence of a dominant and predominantly 'Western' 'scopic regime' that characterized human relationships with the non-human world through her work on Adelaide Zoo. She outlines the emergence of associated 'Western "ways of being" in relation to nature', which she refers to as 'rationalist perspectivalism'. See Anderson, 'Animals, science and spectacle in the city', in J. Wolch and J. Emel, eds, *Animal geographies: place, politics and identity in the nature-culture borderlands* (London, Verso, 1997), pp. 27–50.
- <sup>63</sup> See C. Classen, *Worlds of sense: exploring the senses in history and across cultures* (London, Routledge, 1993), p. 2; and C. Gamage, *Buddhism and sensuality* (Northwestern University Press: printed in Colombo, 1998).
- <sup>64</sup> P. Rodaway, *Sensuous geographies: body, sense and place* (London, Routledge, 1994), p. 22.
- <sup>65</sup> M. Pieris, 'Wildlife in the Jataka', *Loris* **21** (1996), pp. 45–57.
- <sup>66</sup> '...my own native land. Block II, Yala National Park', *Daily News* (3 Mar. 1990) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).
- <sup>67</sup> Kusum Disanayaka, 'Dusk at Yala', *The Island* (8 Aug. 1992) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).
- <sup>68</sup> S. Senadhirra, 'The lure of the jungle', *Loris* **20** (1994), pp. 139–40.
- <sup>69</sup> C. Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape: places, paths and monuments* (Oxford, Berg, 1994), p. 14.
- <sup>70</sup> Cosgrove, 'Ideas and culture', p. 575.
- <sup>71</sup> See Classen, *Worlds of sense*, (p. 6), J.D. Porteous, *Landscapes of the mind: worlds of sense and metaphor* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1990).
- <sup>72</sup> H.S. Panwar and W.M.R.S. Wickeramasinghe, *Management Plan Yala Protected Area Complex [Rubuna National Park Block I to V, Yala Strict Natural Reserve, and Kataragama, Katagamuwa and Nimalawa Sanctuaries], Plan period: 1998–2007*, Vol. 2 (Department of Wildlife Conservation records room, Colombo, 1997).
- <sup>73</sup> Perera, *Society and space*, p. 144.
- <sup>74</sup> S. Rodrigo, 'The Yala bungalow: a loving requiem', *The Island* (21 July 1996) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).
- <sup>75</sup> See G. Chakravorty Spivak, *The post-colonial critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues* (London, Routledge, 1990).
- <sup>76</sup> S. Bulathasinha, 'Yala terrorists to be flushed out', *The Island* (15 Nov. 1995) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).
- <sup>77</sup> Rodrigo, 'The Yala bungalow'.
- <sup>78</sup> S. Williams, 'Whither Yala? Tigers make inroads to South via Yala park', *Midweek Mirror* (3 Oct. 1996) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).
- <sup>79</sup> 'Yala. another casualty?', *The Island* (n.d.) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).

- <sup>80</sup> 'The jungle awakes', *Sunday Times Plus* (9 Nov. 1997) (newspaper clippings file on 'Yala', Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd. Library, Lake House, Colombo).
- <sup>81</sup> Despite the influences of cultural and posthuman geographical theory, signposted throughout this paper, this approach is also politically influenced by feminist perspectives that conceive of the necessity to decouple embodiment and Nature. For an outline, see V. Bell, *Feminist imagination* (London, Sage, 1999), pp. 113–38.
- <sup>82</sup> On 26 Dec. 2004, Yala National Park's coastal areas were badly hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami. At the time this paper went to print the park was closed for ongoing assessment and clear-up work. On the morning of the 26th, the tsunami claimed the lives of nearly 200 tourists and officials in the park.